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Consider the Role of Literary Journals: A Case Study of *Bamboo Ridge*'s Endeavour to Create a Narrative Space for the Future Generations in Hawaii

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Abstract

Bamboo Ridge: The Hawaii Writers' Quarterly is a literary journal launched in 1978 by Eric Chok and Darrell Lum in Hawaii, US. They started the journal in an effort to "foster the appreciation, understanding, and creation of literary, visual, audio-visual and performing arts by and about Hawaii's people" (Vol.1, 1978, p. iv). Till then, the US mainlanders regarded Hawaii's literature written by local people as non-existent. Against the assumption, Chuck and Lum started *Bamboo Ridge* to prove that local people in Hawaii can write.

Bamboo Ridge contributors have dealt with various issues in their works such as ethnic relations, gender issues, and environmental issues of Hawaii. The journal has offered a democratic narrative space where people can share their concerns freely. Another interesting point of *Bamboo Ridge* is that it used to publish works by young people such as elementary school students. The journal aims to nurture the future writers by giving them opportunities to engage in the journal.

Through introducing *Bamboo Ridge*'s various literary activities, this presentation will discuss how literary journals could contribute to reimagining the just, inclusive, and democratic future.

Keywords: Darrell Lum, Ethnic Relations, Democratic Narrative Space, Inclusive Cultural Future, Cultural Resistance.

I. Introduction

Bamboo Ridge: The Hawaii Writers' Quarterly is a literary journal launched in 1978 by Eric Chok and Darrell Lum in Hawaii, the US. They started the journal in an effort to "foster the appreciation, understanding, and creation of literary, visual, audio-visual and performing arts

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by and about Hawaii's people" (1978, p. iv)[1]. Till then, some US mainlanders assumed Hawaii's literature written by non-white people such as Hawaiians and immigrants as non-existent. For example, James Michener, the author of the novel *Hawaii* (1959), wrote in his introduction to Grove Gay and Carl Stroven's *A Hawaiian Reader* that "having arrived in the islands as laboring peasants, the Orientals did not produce a literature of their own." (2) Against the assumption, Chuck and Lum started *Bamboo Ridge* to prove that local people in Hawaii can write.

Bamboo Ridge contributors have dealt with wide-ranging issues in various expression forms such as poetry, prose, drawing, pictures, cartoons. This paper focuses on poetry and prose that deal with social issues such as ethnic/racial relations, gender issues, and environmental issues of Hawaii, etc. The journal has offered a narrative space where people can share their concerns freely. Another interesting point of *Bamboo Ridge* is that it has published works by young people ranging from elementary school to graduate students. The journal aims to nurture future artists by giving them opportunities to engage in the journal.

My analysis of *Bamboo Ridge* is therefore not covering the entire endeavor of the journal. Acknowledging the limit, I will attempt at discussing how literary journals could contribute to reimagining the just, inclusive, and democratic future by referring to *Bamboo Ridge*'s various literary endeavours.

II. A Brief Look at the History and Demography of Hawaii

Hawaii is a string of 137 islands and people live in seven islands (Oahu, Kauai, Maui, Molakai, Hawaii, Lanai, Niihau) (The Smithonian Institute). According to "Hawaii - History & Heritage," "The Hawaiian Islands were first settled as early as 400 C.E., when Polynesians from the Marquesas Islands, 2000 miles away, traveled to Hawaii's Big Island in canoes (The Smithonian Institute)" The islands were governed by the kingdom for a long time. In 1778, a British captain, James Cook came to Hawaii. Since then, European and American sailors, traders, Christian missionaries, who are later given a racial label "haole" (meaning foreigners), had started coming to the islands, and they had greatly affected the traditional lives of Hawaiians[2]. They forced Hawaiians to use English and take up Western ways of living, and forced them to give up their language and traditions. Haoles had gained wealth by expanding sugar plantation business on the islands. They needed cheap laborers in order to expand their business, and immigrant laborers came to the islands from countries such as China, Japan, the Philippines, Korea, Portugal, Puerto Rico, etc. These immigrant laborers eventually settled on the islands. Haoles wanted more profit from their sugar plantation business. For that purpose, they needed to dismantle the power of the kingdom. With the aid of the US military, haoles illegally overthrew the kingdom in 1893, and Hawaii was annexed as a territory of the US in 1898 (The Smithonian Institute).

World War II brought political and economic changes to the islands. When the war occurred, haoles "left Hawaii fearing martial law consequently leading to an economic vacuum in which many Japanese American and Chinese American entrepreneurs were able to capitalize on wide open markets" (Saranillio, 287). Further, after World War II, some Japanese veterans who served the war found themselves still being in the low socio-economic ladder in Hawaii. They questioned haoles' political and economic domination in the islands, and demanded their shares in the islands' politics and economy. They ran for the election as Democrats in 1954 and

[1] "Talk Story, Our Voices in Literature and Song: Hawaii's Ethnic American Writers' Conference" held in June 1978 by Maria Hara, Arnold Hiura, and Stephen Sumida inspired Hawaii's writers to launch their own literary journals such as *Mehine: Seaweeds and Constructions, Hawaii Review, Mele, Tantalus* after this conference (Morales, 110-111, Sumida and Hiura, 128-129). Chock and Lum are one of them.

[2] I will use the words white and haole interchangeably in this paper.

beat the Republican haoles. The victory is called the 1954 revolution and changed the politics and economy of the islands. Professional jobs such as teachers, doctors, and lawyers once occupied by haoles, were open to local people. World War II thus gave non-haole residents opportunities to make Hawaii more inclusive egalitarian community (Nakamura)[3].

Hawaii's multicultural society has been made through the history of colonization, plantation business, and people's commitment to equality. Unlike the US mainland, Hawaii's white population is much smaller and Asian population is much larger as the chart below shows.

Comparison of Race/Ethnicity Percentage in Hawaii and the US[4]

Race/Ethnicity Category	Hawaii	The US
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	19.1%	0.3%
White	44.4%	75.3%
Asian	57.6%	6.4%
Black	3.3%	13.7%

Hawaii seems to enjoy its racial/ethnic diversity at first glance. Yet, Hawaii has its own social problems. The islands are not conflict-free zones.

III. Analysis of *Bamboo Ridge*

Erin Jones writes in his article "The role of literary journals" (2018) the function of literary journals as follows:

> Literary journals are an enigma. They aren't lucrative. They play to a very niche market. They are often run by a small staff of part-time employees or volunteers. And for whoever is producing them, they are a labor of love. Yet, despite all this–or maybe *because* all this–literary journals are one of the most unique and vital literary art forms. The work that appears in literary magazines is special because it's not being guided by target audiences or profit margins. The pieces that make it to the pages of a literary journal were born, I believe, from a certain need. The type of need only an artist knows when they have an idea in their brain and won't be satisfied until they've brought that idea to fruition. But the writing then makes another artistic transformation with the physical act of being included in a literary journal.

Bamboo Ridge is a literary journal, which is a non-profit organization, supported by various grants and donations. Its purpose is to deliver the voices of people in Hawaii, which may make the journal to be read by the limited audience. Contributors have something to express in their brain, and their thought is transformed into art by being included in *Bamboo Ridge*.

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[3] It is important to note that the Japanese political and economic ascendancy after the 1954 revolution is harshly criticized as Japanese settlers' colonialism. For more discussion, see Trask's "Hawaiians, American Colonization, and the Quest for Independence."

[4] The chart was made from Research and Economic Analysis Division Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism State of Hawaii's "Demographic, Social, and Economic Characteristics of Hawaii's Race Groups: 2017-2021" and United States Census Bureau's "QuickFacts United States" (July 2024). Research and Economic Analysis Division Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism State of Hawaii explains that "The sum of the individual race alone or in combination added to more than the total population because people who reports more than one race category were tallied in each category."

Preserving Hawaiian Pidgin English

Many of *Bamboo Ridge* contributors use Hawaiian Pidgin English. As an example, I will introduce a paragraph from Darrell Lum's *Pass on, No Pass Back!* This is a quote from a short story of a boy's memory of a Christmas night.

> Dis da only Christmas present dat my mahdah let me open befoa Christmas cause everybody else's mahdah let da kids open. Dis time, inside da big kids present had one pack firecrackers, numbah one hundred kine, one pack sparklahs, and one pack cracker balls (Lum, 100).

When Christian missionaries came to Hawaii, one of the things they did to Hawaiians was to teach English. They tried to make English as the standard language in the islands. Plantation laborers needed to use English to communicate with their haole employers as well as peer laborers. Local people had to use English, but they have changed English by incorporating their mother languages and its accents, and this mutated English is called Hawaiian Pidgin. Emily Carter writes of the significance of Hawaiian Pidgin in her article "Pidgin English: A Linguistic Journey Through Hawaii's Multicultural Past".

> Hawaiian Pidgin, or Hawaii Creole English (HCE), is more than just broken English; it's a vibrant language born from the cultural melting pot of Hawaii, forged in the fires of plantation life and shaped by generations of interaction between different ethnic groups. This unique linguistic tapestry reflects the history, social dynamics, and spirit of the Hawaiian Islands.

Bamboo Ridge contributors use Hawaiian Pidgin English in their works to vividly convey the lived experiences of people in Hawaii. In doing so, they preserve Hawaiian Pidgin English, which is/will be an integral part of culture of Hawaii for the next generations.

Environment concerns and Hawaiian Sovereignty movement

Hawaii might be associated with its beautiful landscape in many people's mind, yet the islands' environment has been destroyed under the name of development. Islands were developed for plantation in the past and now are developed for tourism. In the process of development, Hawai's nature and Hawaiian's traditional lifestyles as well as their sacred places have been destroyed. Laura E. Lyons (2019) argues the destruction of the islands by developers by quoting Hawaii People's Fund Grants Program' remark, by which says "with every new development the land changes and is destroyed forever. We are too small, and our resources too unique and too significant to our history, to be devalued." (92)

While some *Bamboo Ridge* contributors praise the beauty of islands (e.g., "O Waiono Ka Inoa" by Malia Craver), others are concerned with the destruction of the environment. In her poetry, "Mahaulepu Blues," Luana Ruggiero (1983) laments the destruction of the nature and the loss of traditional lives, and calls for action to stop the further destruction.

> Ah, sweet aloha…
>
> in the end we could lose
>
> The culture and beauty
>
> Hawaii once grew.
>
> But eyes can be opened;
>
> you know, people can choose.

I'm sorry for our sake

if we choose to lose. (41)

The keen sense of being deprived of their connection to the land has led some Hawaiians to initiate the Hawaiian sovereignty movement. A poet, scholar, and one of the activists of the movement Haunani-Kay Trask calls tourism and the destruction of the land by haole and Japanese settlers colonization, problematizes Hawaiians' passive attitudes vis-à-vis the destructions, and calls for self-determination to the land in her poetry "Colonization" (1987).

These poetries illustrate that *Bamboo Ridge* is an important platform where some contributors can voice their determination for the protection of the environment in Hawaii and the restoration of the Hawaiian sovereignty.

Bridging to the Future Writers – Youth Voices

Bamboo Ridge has not only offered a literary creation space for adults but for children and young adults. In doing so, the journal attempts to support the artists of next generations. For example, *Bamboo Ridge* editor and poet Eric Chock held a poetry workshop for 8 to 12 years old students in Hawaii in 1973-1974 school year, and edited a volume collection of children's works *Small Kid Time Hawaii* in *Bamboo Ridge* Issue 12, 1981. The workshop is "The Poets in Schools project, co-sponsored by the Department of Education and the State Foundation on Culture and Arts, with support from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency (Chock, 1981, p. 5)." He writes the purpose of the project.

> The general emphasis is usually on imaginary and events that occur where the students live and play, on familiar people and places. No matter what the poem is about, I ask the students that the feeling or ideas be real to themselves as possible (Chock, 1981, p. 9).

Chock encourages students to freely express their inner thoughts, feelings, and lived experiences without worrying about grammar and spellings. Students write about their everyday life, family, friends, nature, etc. in their works. Their works are rich in expressions and imaginations. The followings are examples.

When we play baseball/ and it starts to rain/ I feel like eating the cloud (Chock,

1981, p. 36) elementary school student

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My father sleeps like earthquake/ When he's drunk (Chock, 1981, p 29) elementary school student

****

My grandmaddah always tells it/like it is to people / One day she said

"You too short. Grow taller."/ I said "How ? "/ She said "Stand up." (Chock, 1981, p. 150) Intermediate school student

In *Bamboo Ridge* Issue 26, 1985, James Harstad& Joseph Stanton, who were involved with the Hawaii English Program-Secondary (HEP-S), hosted HEP-S/Bamboo Ridge Student writing competition, and they edited a *Bamboo Ridge* special issue *The Ten Rules of Fishing*, which includes the literary works of high school students selected from the competition. *Bamboo*

Ridge includes university students' works occasionally, and Wendy Miyake, a graduate student of English, the University of Hawaii at the time her work was selected for *Bamboo Ridge*, "thanks the journal for giving new writers a chance to tell their stories (198)" in Issue 63/64,1994. By encouraging young people to write about their experiences, thoughts, and feelings, *Bamboo Ridge* not only keeps opening a literary space for future generations, but also nurtures their pride of living in Hawaii. Making younger writers may be also one of the keys of the journal's long publication.

Gender and Ethnic conflicts

Bamboo Ridge deals with a wide range of gender issues such as marital problems (marriage, separation, divorce), women's physical problems (menopause, menstruation, pregnancy, miscarriage), relationships (dating, domestic violence, rape, sexual molestation/harassment), prostitution, gender division of labor, queer, and so on[5]. These issues are narrated differently by contributors' gender belonging (women, men or other), their generation (immigrant generation, second generation, etc.), and their racial/ethnic belonging (Hawaiian, Asian, haole, etc.). Each contributor writes about gender issues from her/his unique position and she/he illustrates the complexity of gender issues in Hawaii.

One of the unique gender issues in Hawaii may be intermarriage where gender and race/ethnicity are intersected. *Bamboo Ridge* has some works that deal with interracial marriages. Marie Hara (1994) writes of a second-generation Japanese woman who is disowned by her immigrant father because of her marriage with a haole man in "The Curse Closet." Similarly, Cherylene Lee (1989) writes about a Chinse immigrant father's refusal of his daughter's marriage to a haole man in "Back to Duck Eggs"

Intermarriage used to be discouraged among some ethnic groups in the past, but the recent data shows that the rate of interracial marriages or relationships is much higher than any other state in Hawaii. While the rates of other US state's multiracial/ethnic babies are between 6% (lowest) and 28% (highest), Hawaii's rate is 44% (Pew Research Center, 2017). The data may give us an impression that Hawaii has overcome race/ethnicity-related conflicts.

In "Haole Stops in Kaimuki" in *Bamboo Ridge*, Issue 30, 1986, James Harstad depicts the peaceful coexistence of haole, Portuguese, Japanese, and Filipino. On the other hand, *Intersecting circles: The Voice of Hapa Women in Poetry and Prose*, *Bamboo Ridge* Issue 76, 1999 consists of stories describing the ongoing negative attitudes towards interracially married couples and their children among some Hawaii's residents.[6] *Bamboo Ridge* contributors have given readers the multi-layered views of race/ethnic relations and its intersections with gender in Hawaii in their works.

Passing Down Cultural Heritages

Some *Bamboo Ridge* contributors have written stories focusing on each ethnic group's or island's cultures. For example, the journal has published special issues dedicated to stories and legends of Kauai Island, which Fredrick Wichman has heard from local residents in Issue 28,1985, Issue 53/54, 1991 and Issue 70, 1997. The journal also dedicates a whole issue for Hawaiian writers, titled *Malama: Hawaiian Land and Water,* Issue 29,1985.[7] In this issue, we can see how Hawaiians have coexisted with nature and land in a work such as Josephine Ai's short story (1985), which writes that her grandmother used to caught fish by being guided by a

[5] As far as my reading is concerned, *Bamboo Ridge* did not include works that deal with queer issues till Issue 75, 1999. After the issue, works of queer writers such as Jody Helfand and Donna Tsuyuko Tanigawa have started appearing in the journal.

[6] Hapa literally means half in Hawaiian language, and it connotes racially mixed people.

[7] Malama means to care, to protect in Hawaiian language.

shark (31)[8]. *Bamboo Ridge* has a special issue of Chinese writers, *Pake: Writings by Chinese in Hawaii in Celebration of the 200th anniversary of Chinese Immigration in Hawaii* in 1989, Issue 42/43.[9] In this issue, Bessie Lai (1989) introduces a story in which Chinese immigrants in Hawaii lived happily protected by a Chinese god (17).

Bamboo Ridge has illustrated the rich cultural aspects of Hawaii, yet, when a writer deals with other ethnic groups, it may sometimes result in producing stereotypes. For example, when the Association for Asian American Studies awarded a Japanese-descendant poet and writer, Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Blu's Hanging* for best fiction in 1998, the controversy on her works not only Blu's *Hanging* but *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre* (*Bamboo Ridge*, Issue 58/59, 1993) arose. Some people criticized that her descriptions of Filipinos were rampant with racism and the association revoked the award as a result (Kam, 1998).

Writing about ethnic/race groups has an inherent risk of denigrating some groups, yet, giving readers diverse views of ethnic/race groups and raising their critical consciousness may be one of the roles of not only *Bamboo Ridge* but also literary journals in general.

Other social issues

Bamboo Ridge has dealt with various social issues in Hawaii such as the presence of military bases and personnel, homelessness, poverty, im/migration, adoption, elderly nursing, religions and so on. Since it is difficult to introduce all the works that deal with these issues, this paper will introduce military base problem and religious problem.

Mavis Hara's poem, "Visiting Hickam Air Force Base, 1956" (Issue 41, 1989), depicts the conflictual relations between people in a military base and local people.

> He bursts through/the property squared hedge/of a Hickam Air Force Base yard, /7 year old boy/in striped T-shirt and blue jeans/"Get away from my dog" he yells. /
> I withdraw my 7 year old hand/from the soft fur of this puppy/that waddled under the hedge/a few moments before. /I sit back with a thump/but remember to squeeze/my thighs shut/and pull my skirt safely down/over my knees. My mother/told me there is something there that is dangerous (9-10)

Hara's poetry shows the hostile attitudes of a haole boy in the military base in the 1950s. According to Saliha Bayrak (2024), "Hawaii is the most densely militarized state in the nation. About 17 percent of the population is military-affiliated, and some 6 percent of the land is occupied by military bases." Bayrak reports that young generations are fighting against the militarization of Hawaii. They are not only concerned about the violation of land by military but also the recruitment of young people by military. Hara writes the reality of what it was like to live face to face with military bases in the past, and makes readers think of the current military presence in Hawaii.

Hawaii is diverse in race/ethnicity as well as religions. Susan Nunes (1998) depicts religious confrontation in her prose "The Poor Pagan Children" in *Babboo Ridge*, Issue 72. A girl, whose mother is Japanese Buddhist and father is Potrguese Catholic, was insulted by her new neighbor child from the mainland. The haole child was Baptist and told the girl that "Buddhists are heathens." (88) To the shocked girl, her mother said that "I'm sure you know that Grandpa and Grandma Shinoda are as good as any Catholic. Your Father Marius included (90)." Her mother told her that religious tolerance is important for the maintenance of multireligious Hawaii.

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[8] Shark is one of aumakua (protector deities) in Hawaiian mythology (Lebra, 19).
[9] Pake means Chinese in Hawaiian Pidgin English.

IV. *Bamboo Ridge* Controversy

I have argued that *Bamboo Ridge* has provided rich and complex social aspects of Hawaii in their writings to readers for a long time. Its cultural and literary contributions are undeniable. Nevertheless, *Bamboo Ridge* has received some criticism over the years. One of the founding editors, Eric Chock responds to various criticisms against *Bamboo Ridge* in his speech at the University of Hawaii Manoa, English Department Colloquium series on May 2, 1996. This speech is published under the title of "The Neocolonization of *Bamboo Ridge*: Repositioning *Bamboo Ridge* and Local Literature in the 1990s," *Bamboo Ridge*, Issue 69, 1996. I will introduce what kind of criticism the journal has been received by summarizing his speech.

(Non-Haole vs. Haole) When the journal was published, its contributors comprised of non-haole and haole writers. Since subtle hostility against haole among non-haole people still continues, the presence of haole writers seems to bother some audience. To this criticism, Chuck says, "simply by publishing what we liked best without regard to who the writer was led us to publishing a significant number of Haole writers" (Chock, 1996, 13).

(Ethnically biased) The journal was also criticized for its ethnocentrism. The founding editors Lum and Chock are Chinese descendants, and many contributors are Japanese descendants. Some point out that the works of Filipino, Puerto Rican, Portuguese, Hawaiians, the important members of multicultural Hawaii, are missing in *Bamboo Ridge*. To this, Chock says, "we tried to leave no one out (Chock,1996, 14)."

(Hawaiian vs. Non-Hawaiian) *Bamboo Ridge* has been trying to encompass diverse racial/ethnic arrays of writers in Hawaii, however to the eyes of some, the journal does not include enough Hawaiian writers. In addition to it, the journal is criticized that its use of English aligns with neocolonial domination over Hawaiian language and people. As a result, the journal was criticized for deepening the rift between Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian writers, and for exhibiting a neocolonial attitude to Hawaiian writers (Chock,1996, 17). While admitting that *Bamboo Ridge* does not represent Hawaiian voices enough (1996, 19), Chock notes that "*Bamboo Ridge* is trying to maintain an intellectual space in which all these issues may be explored and none excluded (Chock, 1996, 23)."

(Not political enough) Chock mentions that "The mainland writers criticized the Local writers for not being political enough" (Chock, 1996, 20). It is true that some mainland minority writers indict the various forms of discrimination against minorities in the US in their works. To their eyes, Hawaii's local resident writers' including *Bamboo Ridge* contributors seemingly less conflictual descriptions of their lives in Hawaii may look apolitical. To this criticism, Chock notes that "Local writers protested that the political levels were implicit in our writing (Chock, 1996, 20)."

Some of Chock's responses to criticisms sound evasive and therefore this speech is also criticized as "highly problematic (Fujikane, 1997, p. 55)." Yet, these various criticisms throwing at *Bamboo Ridge* may be a proof that the journal has received attention. As long as the publication of *Bamboo Ridge* continues, it may invite more criticism, but criticism may toughen and sophisticate the journal at the same time.

V. Conclusion

Bamboo Ridge will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2028. This will be a great achievement for a small press such as *Bamboo Ridge.* Their achievement did not come easily. Chock writes,

> Over the years I have often wanted to stop the press because it's too much work for too little reward.[…] If you are dedicated writer looking for a home for your writing, we want it to be here. […] We're just trying to produce the stuff which is the truth of

> this place in all its variety. […] We just want to keep developing the literature and scholars will categorize the work however they do, and that's not our main concern (1996, 25).

Running a small literary press may be painstaking but Chock clearly notes that editors strive to continue to publish the journal because there are people who need a space for their artistic self-expression. Due to its long-term publication and diverse topics, the journal has invited criticism. Yet, the journal never ceases to offer a literary space for artists in Hawaii who need the journal regardless of criticism. Their undaunting attitude to keep the literary space open to all without any exclusion may not only enable the journal to reimagine the just, inclusive, and democratic future but also their continuing contribution to the development of literature in Hawaii.

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